DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 037 487 UD 009 535

AUTHOR Hull, W. Frank, IV
TITLE The "Special Admission" Student and the Colleges.
INSTITUTION Pennsylvania State Univ., University Park. Center for the Study of Higher Education.
REPORT NO CSHE-R-1
PUB DATE Nov 69
NOTE 21p.

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$1.15
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes, Admission Criteria, *College Admission, College Freshmen, *Disadvantaged Youth, Individualized Programs, *Negro Students
IDENTIFIERS *Pennsylvania State University, PSU

ABSTRACT

This report discusses the "Special Admission" program adapted by Pennsylvania State University (P.S.U.) for "culturally deprived" students. Deans from the ten colleges within P.S.U. give their views on the program. There was general agreement arrived at among the Deans in regard to the following: the "special admission" students will not be separated as a group from other entering freshmen; the former students should be assimilated as rapidly as possible into the ranks of the regular students; centralization or at least coordination in selecting the "special admission" students was felt essential; these students should be provided with whatever individual attention is required; and, grading methods should not be altered in any way for the "special admission" students. The Deans, however, vary as to how far in the future they feel themselves committed to continue their efforts for the "special admission" student. (KG)

ED037487

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

09535 E

Center for the Study of Higher Education

The Pennsylvania State University

THE "SPECIAL ADMISSION" STUDENT AND THE COLLEGES

W. Frank Hull IV
Research Assistant

UD 009 535

November, 1969

Report No. 1

Universities and colleges throughout the land are presently evaluating and re-evaluating their mission and relevance to current issues swelling within American society. One such issue is that of Black youth and their representation in institutions of higher education. One and a half million freshmen began school in the Fall of 1968; six to seven percent of them are estimated to have been Black.[1] How should the universities and colleges respond to the Blacks who, although often under-qualified by traditional academic measures, are seeking admission? What should the university do for them once admitted? How and when should the university's concern for Blacks be broadened to include "disadvantaged" persons of all races? Or should the university of today do anything at all apart from that which it does for all of its students? In other words, should the university be "color blind?"

The Pennsylvania State University has traditionally worked to serve the commonwealth of Pennsylvania and to provide higher

---

[1] John A. Greager, et. al. National Norms for Entering College Freshman - Fall, 1968. Washington, D.C.: Office of Research, The American Council on Education, 1968.

education for the sons and daughters of its citizens. During the Fall of 1968, the University made one further step in striving to respond to the challenges of present-day issues. President Eric A. Walker invited the ten Colleges within The Pennsylvania State University to admit any prospective student so desired under a "special admission" quota. Less than one week prior to the arrival of these students,[2] the Office of the Coordinator of University Programs for the Disadvantaged and the Center for the Study of Higher Education cooperatively undertook to interview the Deans of the ten Colleges and other staff whom the Deans wished to involve in order to attain as complete a description as possible of the Colleges' plans and readiness immediately prior to the arrival of the "special admission" students. It is not the intent of this report to offer solutions, recommendations, or criticisms. What follows is primarily a description of what was found in speaking with the Deans and those staff and faculty that the Deans chose to invite. Overview comments will be made at the end to set this report in a broader perspective.

The "Special Admission" Students.

The number of "special admission" students to be admitted by each College, their selection, financial aid, program, etc. was decided by the individual Colleges. Spaces were, in this manner, reserved for a total of one hundred ninety-eight

---

[2] In specific, during September 15-17, 1969.

students. During this present study, the Deans report that two hundred and eight spaces have been filled, and of these students, one hundred seventy-seven or eighty-five percent are expected to be Black. The number of Blacks, of course, represents an ambiguous category and is dependent upon the visual, judgmental ability of various individuals on the Dean's staff to classify Blacks accurately.

To be Black, though, is not a prerequisite for being "disadvantaged." As others have pointed out, "poverty is more than the shortage of dollars. It is the absence of encouragement, of confidence, of aspiration, and of achievement."[3] Thus, in like regards, the Colleges tried to identify students who were disadvantaged educationally, financially, or culturally. Using lists of potential students such as those provided by the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students, the Youth for the Advancement of Black Students, and the Admissions Office of The Pennsylvania State University, the Colleges typically began to extend invitations for particular students to apply under this special quota. On the other hand, graduates of the University's Upward Bound Program seem to have been the most appealing single source for "special admissions." Faculty and student referrals of individual students were considered when applicable.

---

[3]Samuel D. Proctor. "Racial Pressures on Urban Institutions." The Campus and the Racial Crisis. Washington, D.C.: The American Council on Education, 1969, p. 29.

Faculty were used in a "recruiting" capacity to supplement the Admission's Office in six Colleges. As many as fifty to as few as one faculty were so involved, but the majority of the Colleges used under five faculty in this manner.

Criteria upon which the "special admission" students were selected were vague. All of the Deans were seemingly aware of the growing controversy in the literature as to the effectiveness or fairness of admitting atypical students to the University on the basis of traditional criteria[4]--especially with regards to Black youth--yet the Deans' approach was basically conservative. Scores from the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), high school rank, and individual recommendations were relied upon generally. In one College, all of the "special admission" students are admissible under normal Summer admission standards.[5] One College made a point of de-emphasizing SAT scores and one other College attempted to find students from all over the scale,

---

[4]For example, S. A. Kendrick, "The Coming Segregation of our Selective Colleges." College Board Review, No. 66 (Winter, 1967-1968), 6-13, claims that to require a verbal SAT minimum score of five hundred will eliminate over ninety-nine percent of the Black students. Alexander W. Austin ("Racial Considerations in Admissions." The Campus and the Racial Crisis. Washington, D.C.: The American Council on Education, 1969) concludes that "...the model of selective admissions based on test scores and grades is inappropriate for institutions of higher education." (p. 87). Although Austin is disputed, his article seems to represent one of the best recent attempts to face the question squarely.

[5]None of these students had an SAT score of below nine hundred.

yet it was not clear to the writer how they went about this. On the whole, though, the Colleges tried to find motivation and interest within "special admission" students--even if it was often unclear as to how this was judged. They sought, accordingly, the best qualified students that they could find. Thus, the "special admission" students turn out to be basically "economically disadvantaged" or "racially disadvantaged" rather than "high risks" academically. As one Dean put it, they are the "cream of the crop."

It is interesting to note that the Deans departed so cautiously from the traditional criterion methods even though there is precedent for doing otherwise. International students at The Pennsylvania State University are normally selected on the basis of individual consideration and those who claim English as a second language are normally given an extra hundred points on their verbal SAT scores. Various educators have pointed to the need of teaching English to so-called "disadvantaged Blacks" as a second language yet the "special admission" students were not provided these considerations except as an individual Dean and his faculty decided. The Deans, rather, were generally concerned with keeping the criteria as high and predictable of success grades as possible.

The Program.

Accordingly, faculty committees and the Deans have selected the "special admission" students and they are arriving on campus

as this is being written. What will they encounter?

The Deans unanimously indicate that the "special admission" students will not be separated as a group from the other entering freshmen. Nevertheless, they will merit special attention. One College plans an "orientation to the system" informal meeting for their "special admission" students. In the majority of the Colleges, the academic advisors will know which of their students are "special admission" students. One College has established a special work-study program for their "special admission" students. Another has a weekly, voluntary "learning seminar" available primarily for "special admission" students. Two Colleges will provide half-time professionals to be concerned with the "special admission" students and their progress.[6] A special course in remedial math (no credit)[7] will be available as will special English sections for low ability freshmen in English skills. One College stands ready to establish special courses if a need appears. Two Colleges will recommend specific program sequels for "special admission" students distinct from those taken by other freshmen. One College will limit the number of credits taken by "special admission" students to nine. Generally, the Deans are quite clear in their desire to provide whatever "individual attention" the "special admission"

---

[6]One of these is a faculty member and the other is a Graduate Assistant.

[7]Math 0 has consequently become Math 6 and presently carries three credits.

students require and in their hope that these students will receive this attention from their faculties.

Individual attention, accordingly, brings up the question of faculty advisors and tutors. Seven out of ten Colleges had selected their faculty advisors by the time this study was carried out--one College made this selection last Spring and had the advisor interview and begin to establish rapport then. Of the ninety-four advisors selected at this point, sixty-eight are faculty at the Associate Professor or Professor level. The majority have been at the University over four years. Fifteen are between the age of twenty to twenty-nine; forty-three, between the age of thirty to thirty-nine; thirty, between the age of forty to forty-nine; and twenty-two are over fifty. In other words, the advisors tend to be mature faculty who have been in the business long enough to know their way around and familiar enough with The Pennsylvania State University to guide "special admission" students. Two are Black. These advisors were generally selected from a list of volunteers. Two Colleges went further. In these Colleges, a list of "good" advisors was secured, based upon (1) reports from students in the past and (2) success of particular faculty in guiding past students through to graduation. One College plans to have a seminar program for advisors to keep them aware of the concerns of the "special admission" students and to share experience as it is developed.

A more ambitious plan is operating in one College where students will each have three advisors available to them.[8]

Tutors will be available within every College in one form or another, but there is no concensus concerning how to effect this. A Volunteer Service Center established in cooperation between the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs and one of the Colleges, which has as one of its functions to provide tutors university-wide, will be relied upon almost exclusively by two Colleges. Five Colleges will use the Volunteer Service Center's services when helpful but are fully prepared to offer tutors within their own College in one manner or another.

---

[8]This College reports: "Our planned system for the advising of the disadvantaged is as follows:

> a. All are, and have been in contact with a Black Faculty member who is helping with problems of housing, finance, and person adjustment to University life. This individual has personally met with each incoming student in the program and has maintained contact throughout the summer. He will be available constantly throughout the year in this same capacity.
>
> b. Each student is being assigned additionally to an academic advisor in his major field who has expressed a particular interest in working with this group and has been a member of the committee which has been implementing our total approach to programming for the disadvantaged.
>
> c. The women will have available to them a person as a source for non-academic help in addition to their academic advisor.

We feel that the advantages of these approaches are (1) that the student is not placed in the situation where he must either interact with a specific advisor or work alone and (2) that the student knows advice on other problems of University life (which often are greater than, or may be causing the academic problems) is available from an individual they are familiar with."

Three Colleges plan to handle their own tutoring. As one Dean reminds us, "a College faculty should be willing to assume their own tutorials." In this College, faculty plan to do active tutoring. Colleges report thirty-six faculty tutors throughout the University available to the "special admission" students. One is Black. One College has provide a faculty member with a half-time release from his normal responsibilities to tutor the "special admission" students. Another College hopes its "Reading Center" will be used by "special admission" students who need this type of help, but at this point the question as to how the "special admission" student will pay the fee involved is undecided. English and the foreign languages plan to do their own tutoring within their particular subjects. The majority of the Colleges plan to have advanced undergraduate students and honorary society members available for tutoring (some voluntary and some on a fee basis). No one is certain that such efforts will be sufficient, but then no one seems to have arrived at a better solution. Consequently, tutoring will be tried under this approach and altered when there becomes reason to do so.

Some Deans are concerned about the ambiguity of such plans. As one Dean put it, "we do not know what they will need help in." A second Dean conceptualized the issue more broadly when he commented, "we do not know what the problem is." But overall, the Colleges generally are prepared to handle difficulties as

they arise. None will have any type of program for tutors; the majority hope is that the Volunteer Service Center will become more experienced in tutoring than any single College.

Grading methods and procedures will not be altered in any way for the "special admission" students. In this the Deans exhibited their firmest concensus. All of the Deans seem to agree with the single Dean who proclaimed that grades would be altered "over my dead body." Nevertheless, there is indication that some tampering with the academic policies is likely. As one Dean gently and patiently explained, one must "interpret the rules and bend them now and then..." This, he hastened to add, was "normal practice" with every student. In other words, the Deans are aware that the "special admission" students may need a longer period in which to produce acceptable work. Thus, deferred grades might be freely used for the student's benefit. Individual circumstances will be carefully and fairly considered to keep the "special admission" student "out of the automatic drop procedures."[9] One Dean found that he has already had to modify scholarship selection procedures, to some degree, in order to gain scholarships for some of his "special admission" students who would not have received them otherwise. Four Deans,

---

[9] This is about as close as the Deans come to the opinion expressed by David G. Brown ("Allocating Limited Resources." The Campus and the Racial Crisis. Washington, D.C.: The American Council on Education, 1969, p. 100) that all penalties should be dropped for these students during the freshman year. In this view, "D" and "F" grades could be eliminated and the student would simply receive no credit.

on the other hand, strongly indicate a refusal to modify any policies or procedures at all. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Deans are human and are all going to do everything in their power to give the "special admission" student the benefit of the doubt to attain an education. The only difference among the Deans appears to be that some admit to more specific tendencies than others.

One College has made tentative plans for informal socializing with "special admission" students. The other Colleges have no extracurricular plans.

The Broader Issues.

In studies of this type, one is always interested to learn what the Colleges are trying to produce, but it is sometimes difficult to get a firm grasp on this issue. The present study followed suit. The majority opinion of the Deans is that these students should be assimilated as rapidly as possible into the ranks of the "regular" College students. This will be judged by their grades. One Dean, though, was clearer here. He spoke of trying to develop in his "special admission" students what he termed a "study orientation." In other words, for this Dean, the grades attained or the accumulative averages were insufficient measures of what his College was after.

Two Deans are concerned with producing viable products for the economic market in four years. For this prospective, the Deans will "evaluate" their success after four years when it

becomes evident as to how their "special admission" students function in the "larger society." No specific plans, though, have been made to "evaluate" the relevance or response of any of the College's "special admission" students within their individual Colleges.

For the most part, the College's response to "special admission" students has been a result of faculty involvement. Each College had at least one committee of faculty working (with one College concluding that a "faculty committee does not work"). In at least three Colleges, the Dean frankly sees himself as merely accepting the committee's recommendations. Where the Deans feel they need to exercise control is in relation to general academic policy decisions. In one Dean's case, when faculty committee recommendations were significantly altered, it was because financial resources were not available to the degree required by the committee's recommendations.

The Deans themselves spend little time on matters dealing with "special admission" students: seven Deans estimate that the amount of time in a normal week that they spend on such matters is between one and two percent of a forty-hour week, one Dean estimates five to seven percent, and two Deans estimate ten to fifteen percent. In a few cases, Associate Deans assume responsibilities for matters dealing with the "special admission" students, but most of the effort seem to come from a concerned faculty member who somehow finds time to become involved.

Black faculty were involved when possible in matters pertaining to the "special admission" students in five Colleges. The total Black faculty that the Deans could count at The Pennsylvania State University added to twenty-six.[10] Eight Colleges claimed three or fewer Black faculty members. In at least two Colleges, Black faculty were involved as Blacks and thus felt to have a fuller understanding necessary for adequate planning. Black students, on the other hand, were involved in matters concerning "special admission" students in six Colleges, mainly in recruiting.

Four Colleges have specific policy statements or faculty resolutions giving the faculty's direction and assumptions in these matters. Generally, the Deans themselves are committed to the Colleges' involvement with "special admission" students. Three Deans expressed strong awareness of the professional needs of Blacks in areas of their College's responsibility, and one Dean was clearly convinced that the "special admission" students have a great deal to teach and offer his own faculty and students. Typically, this was the case, but there were also indications that not all faculty were actively supporting or urging on a forward lead by the Dean. Faculty were said to resent change; some faculty were thought more committed to vocal expression than concrete action with their own time. Some faculty seemed

---

[10] It should be noted that one College has adopted (July 16, 1969) a policy statement to the effect that "each department...when hiring new faculty should give highest priority to the hiring of qualified Black professionals." Also, the Resolution of Task Force 2, The Pennsylvania State University Encampment, 1969, attempts to focus on this same issue.

to be in tension with the Dean because of his "liberal" leading. This was especially true over the issue of better qualified students not gaining admission or financial support while a less qualified student is advanced. This, though, should not be over-stated since eight of the College Deans felt strong faculty backing or at least faculty conviction.

Interestingly enough, the Deans vary significantly as to how far in the future they feel themselves committed to continue their efforts for the "special admission" student. Two Deans have no present plans to do this again next year; one plans at least one more year; two feel committed to four years; two feel they wish to continue indefinitely; and three simply are uncertain. While one Dean finds that finances are not the problem, seven Deans feel that the future of their College's involvement with "special admission" students is dependent upon locating more finances. In order to finance this year at least one faculty position was dissolved, a few graduate assistantships were eliminated, and equipment orders were cut back. As one Dean put it, "I'm broke!"

Strong unanimity, though, was found among the Deans concerning their overall feelings. All felt that the centralization or at least coordination of selecting "special admission" students was essential.[11] Seven want financial aid centralized also. What appears to have happened is that each College has been forced to produce an "instant" admissions officer, financial

---

[11] cf. Report of Committee on Special Admissions and Supportive Services, Task Force 1 and 4, The Pennsylvania State University Encampment, 1969, for an expression of this sentiment on a wider base. The Deans refer to this as "recruiting" students, but the administration prefers to see this as offering "educational opportunity" for a special group.

aid officer, and housing officer. Administrative procedures, especially among lower echelon administrators and clerks, seem to be adding to the already complex policies and procedures. For example, there is concern among the Deans as to how they can effectively and efficiently put petty cash into the hands of a student who needs a pair of shoes without confusing the financial aid package. How does such a procedure move through the Bursar's office quickly?

Some problems are also apparent. One Dean complains that the Division of Counseling is counseling his "special admission" students into other Colleges when the student moves toward admission. Several Deans were concerned about the policy of their continuing to support financially their entering "special admission" students even when these students transfer to other Colleges. One Dean sees "remarkable cooperation...total dedication" among the Colleges and agencies for the "special admission" student while a second Dean claims, "I do not worry about coordination with the other Colleges. We can do our job; if they cannot, that is their problem."

Several Deans call for "educational leadership" in the top administration. The Deans were not fully convinced that the top administration was strongly in support of a "special admission" program for the "disadvantaged" and questioned what it is that the University as a whole considers its mission for the "disadvantaged." In this the Deans seem to

call for a more central educational leader to point the direction as to goals and purposes of a "special admission" program. For example: Is the University to be responsible for educating those youth below the normal student standards? But the Deans' call for unified leadership is in no way shirking their own responsibility for leadership within their own faculties. Some are less than decided on what needs to be done, but most are leading and feel they and their College faculties have benefited from this year's experience. As an Associate Dean put it candidly, "I talked to more Black families this Spring than I have the rest of my life...they know what they want." For this Dean, the experience, confusing and frustrating at times, was simply great and, in his mind, good for the faculty also. Another Dean took the exact opposite position somewhat sarcastically.

The Deans have done a job on the run against time. In most cases, they realize this. Some are eager with the possibilities; some show signs of being bitter with scars. All are striving in an ambiguous area. These "special admission" students who are arriving are not "high risks;" they are financially lacking. Previous attempts at admitting and educating an atypical student indicate that success is dependent upon"...adequate counseling, chiefly academic but carrying over to personal and social areas, and on a

heterogeneous--not wholly remedial--academic program allowing for a sense of accomplishment early in the student's career."[12] To varying degrees, the Colleges are prepared to provide more of the first half of this than the latter. Some Colleges seem prepared to provide it all.

All of this being said, it seems only appropriate to acknowledge that the Deans' hesitancy in particular areas dealing with the "special admission" student is part of a larger national picture. After the Supreme Court decision of 1954, educators at all levels were made acutely aware of something that many would have claimed obvious: Blacks are discriminated against in education. Full recognition of all the implications evolving with this increasing awareness is just beginning to be scratched. The Pennsylvania State University was but one of many universities in this country that found that it had work to do.

No one has the answers. Among those educators and institutions which are prepared to try to respond to the Black student's need, there is division. Some argue that the university should admit any Black because of his Blackness and set up special programs limited to Blacks and taught by Blacks under Black standards to meet the

---

[12] Lewis B. Mayhew. "Programs for the Disadvantaged Student" (research sponsored by the College Entrance Examination Board, unpublished).

needs of the Black community. Others among these feel equally committed to Black areas of study, like any other area of ethnic study, but argue that academic standards must be upheld lest a Black degree becomes an inferior degree and thereby useless to the very Black community that demanded it. Some justify their views on the basis that the Black youth feels repressed in white society and needs separateness and uniqueness in order to reach Black maturity, while others justify opposing views under the assumption that immediate satisfaction of desired goals is not necessarily helpful over a longer period of time. Still others argue that the university should re-evaluate its goals and methods in relations to both the Black under-qualified, potential student and the regular admission student who finds his post-secondary educational experience to be irrelevant. In particular, it is argued that Black professionals in all areas of society should be the primary goal of a university while Black studies are a secondary feature necessary, but not all-sufficient, for an adequate program.[13] Still others are firmly convinced that the only fair way for a university to deal with students is to treat them objectively and consequently alike in every way possible.

---

[13] cf. Amitai Etzioni. "Faculty Response to Racial Tensions." The Campus and the Racial Crisis. Washington, D.C.: The American Council on Education, 1969, and W. Arthur Lewis. "Black Power and the American University." University: A Princeton Quarterly. No. 40 (Spring, 1969), p. 8-12.

But there are alternatives. A university does have the option to experiment selectively. Certain campuses can be set aside for varying admission standards--as is already explicitly the unplanned situation between the "Harvard Universities" and the "Parson Colleges" of the nation. Certain programs, colleges, or options could be opened experimentally with radically differing admission criteria any time that educators so choose. The history of American higher education is thematically that of an education thought proper for "gentlemen, lawyers, and ministers" molding itself to meet the needs of a changing nation. The 1957 impact of the Russian Sputnik is but one of the more recent events to bring about changes in education from the ground up.

The Deans at The Pennsylvania State University felt a need for some centralization.[14] Possibly the decentralized approach adopted by The Pennsylvania State University for "special admission" students needs to be rethought. Decentralization has produced a strong variety of approaches among the ten Colleges which has proved valuable for the first year. Possibly centralization offers advantages in specific areas. Possibly top administrative leaders need to reconsider their channels of communication throughout the university

---

[14] cf. Paul B. Foreman. "Race Confronts Universities: A Preface for Policy." Unpublished paper at The Pennsylvania State University, n.d.

in order that their leadership might be felt by a wider range of people. Possibly faculty need to reconsider what it is that they have to communicate to their students. Possibly the students need to develop a clearer grasp of what it is that they seek from the university.

The Dean's question as to the responsibility of this University for educating the student who is below the normal academic standard goes unanswered. Some of the Deans seem unsure in their own minds of the assumptions made by a former U. S. Commissioner of Education in saying "equal educational opportunity does not result from treating all pupils equally."[15] But hopefully the Dean's question will not continue to go unanswered. To avoid the question by bringing in only the Black "cream of the crop" will actually be to answer the question in the negative by default.

---

[15] Harold Howe II in an address to the College Entrance Examination Board. cf. Chronicle of Higher Education (November 8, 1967), p. 1.